



# Vintage *vixen*

Blogger and stylist Irene O'Brien knows the value of money and how to make it stretch whether at home or abroad





street parties are always a good option. Often the more expensive approach is the less authentic one. If you're too precious, you can miss out. In saying that, arriving in Delhi was a huge culture shock – the pungent smells, hoards of people, the cows and stray dogs roaming the streets. It was an overload of the senses; it made me want to run but after a month travelling elsewhere in India, I returned to Delhi and really enjoyed it.

*My love affair with vintage clothes intensified in Melbourne.* You hear people say Australia doesn't have real culture but I found the city to be brimming with it. I came across some great vintage stores and bought a couple of beautiful dresses which I still love. I spent a lot of time frequenting markets in every country I visited. You find great bargains and learn the true price of things. I always feel happier buying directly from a local designer, at home or abroad.

Something I always wanted to do was to report the traffic – it always sounded so glamorous. I worked at AA Roadwatch on my return to Dublin. That was followed by a short stint in TV production but my head was always full of vintage so that's when I began writing my blog, *Why didn't I Live in the 1940s?* I organised the Vintage Sessions, a style and information-sharing event with Ruth Griffin last December and we're planning another one soon. I also co-run the Le Cool Dublin Walking Experience, a cultural tour of the city. I've mostly worked freelance which has meant a lot of variety. I love styling, event planning and writing in equal measure.

*As well as the opportunity to wear something old,* I love the craftsmanship of vintage clothes. Not everything old is valuable but you can certainly choose vintage as an investment, particularly if you buy what the label is most famous for, say with Dior, it would be the New Look collection. There are fantastic, long-established vintage stores in Ireland

including Jenny Vander, Jean Cronin and Dirty Fabulous in Dublin. Around the country the dearly missed late Gladys Adams, her Tullamore shop is now run by her daughters. There's After Sybil in Louth and Miss Daisy Blue in Cork. There's also the opportunity to find gems online but you need to be savvy. Ask lots of questions and check the returns policy. Look at the close-up images and consider whether it really is a 1940s tea dress or a 70s reproduction. You have to have your wits about you because people have been known to change labels. You also have to keep an open mind and take into account that sizes and shapes have changed wildly over the decades so measurements are important. Vintage shopping can be a matter of getting out of your comfort zone while staying true to







## Secret address book

### Favourite pub

I love nothing more than a pub where you can drink glasses of Guinness in the afternoon with equal chances of encountering chowder and a trad session. Lynnots in Achill rocks.

### Favourite restaurant

Brunch is my absolute favourite meal and you'd be hard pushed to find finer Eggs Benedict than the ones served in Dublin's Lennox Street Café. Yum! Definitely 777 on Dublin's George's Street for dinner and cocktails – amazing on both counts.

### Favourite shop

I'd have to say Anthropologie in Manhattan for a mix of beautiful fashion, brands and homeware. It makes me ridiculously happy just being there. It's in the UK now but it's way pricier.

### Favourite clothes shop

It's too hard to mention just one vintage store in Ireland so I'll go New York again. The Family Jewels in is a wonderland.

### Favourite place for people watching

The magic of the arrivals hall in Dublin airport hasn't faded since I was a kid collecting my dad from trips. I could sit for hours watching everyone come through those doors, trying to imagine their story and that of those waiting. I always tear up – I'm sure I make people very uncomfortable.

yourself. Patience is the key to finding good pieces.

*The popularity of period dramas is fostering a greater appreciation for older clothing and values. It's a comfort thing. People are getting to know their tailors, cobblers and store owners. In an era of disposable fashion, buying vintage is good for the soul. I suppose I bring that attitude into the home I share with my boyfriend. Even though it's rented, it's a reflection of us with lots of inherited furnishings. When your family knows you like old things, you tend to get first dibs on most pieces. Our table was my great-aunt's brought from Poole; an old wooden cabinet belonged to my brother-in-law's mother and the floral lamps were my great uncle's from the States 70 years ago. Also my boyfriend's mum gave me her first ever typewriter which I love. It has so much more character than our laptops. My boyfriend is a photographer and framer, both of which come in handy for decorating our walls. When travelling, I love collecting old posters to frame. It's a nice way of remembering a trip if the local artwork doesn't really float your boat. I tend to get nice antique treats on birthdays – a lovely old Singer sewing machine is a particular favourite. I adore books and have been gifted many.*

*I just like pretty and interesting things so when I really love something I go for it. The apartment is a combination of all these pieces. There's no interiors theme. I'd find it impossible to stick to one style, I suppose that's true of my life in general. p*

*"My mum made her own bridesmaids' dresses which I think inspired me to learn this skill"*